Human Events *A Weekly Analysis for the American Citizen*
Combined with the Magazine ANALYSIS
Editorial Office 1710 Rhode Island Ave., N. W., WASHINGTON 6, D. C. *Telephone* NATIONAL 2066
Vol. VIII, No. 29, *Issue Number* 390, JULY 18, 1951 ★ *Editor:* FRANK C. HANIGHEN ★ *Associate Editor:* FRANK CHODOROV

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TOO MUCH TO TAKE

By William F. Buckley, Jr.

We conservatives have suffered a great deal. Twenty years of political impotence; two score years of intellectual inertia; abusive speeches, articles, columns and books that, piled on top of each other, would tower arrogantly over the gates of heaven -- all this our dwindling cadre has borne and, withal, patiently. But I, for one, am now suffering from a sprained back.

For in the last year or so, confident no doubt that there is little left to be said with respect to how this country ought to be run, our restless and expansive collectivists have wandered afield, this time to ravish us in the inner sanctity of our boudoirs: they are now telling us how we conservatives ought to act, and, in the course of it all, what "conservatism" really is!

This last has become a lively pastime for the "liberals". It was most brazenly touched off, as far as I know, in the early spring of 1950 by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote for the New York Times Sunday magazine an article, "Needed: An Intelligent Opposition", or some such title. The ink wasn't dry when Herbert Agar tackled the same subject for Harper's, in which he outlined carefully what conservatives ought to think, say and do. Chester Bowles and Henry Steele Commager and scores of others have carried the banner forward in their head-on rush to save "conservatism" from the abysses in which it will flounder if the conservatives are left to their own resources. They tell us we must refashion our thinking "if we wish to serve our country". (Or, better still, to avoid provincialism, "if we wish to serve the world".)

Their arguments all follow a pattern: "Look, gentlemen, why don't you face up to the fact that a social revolution has occurred in the United States in the last several decades. No jeremaids, no melancholy post-mortems are going to change this. Social Security, farm parities, progressive income taxes, irredeemable paper currency, a large and entrenched bureaucracy, withering state borders, powerful unions -- all these are here to stay. Why not acknowledge them and formulate a constructive alternative to the Democratic Platform, an alternative which

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will accept the foregoing reforms and focus, accordingly, on some new, intelligent casi belli -- such as, for example, administrative procedure, efficient management, and the like. Yours are negative policies. You're always against this or that; you seldom come forward with original and constructive legislation of your own. As firm believers in democracy, we 'liberals' believe there ought to be more than one political party; but the way it's been going, what we have in fact amounts to just one party, because you don't seem to learn, your quadrennial embarrassments notwithstanding, that your reactionary program is unacceptable."

II

Incredibly, this approach electrifies many conservatives, and leaves them impressed and agog. It must be the force of habit that causes so many individualists to resign themselves to the invincibility of "liberal" dicta. For it is these counsels that are molding the thinking of many elements of the Republican Party, nominally the "Opposition Party".

Witness the popularity of Stassen with the Young Republican Club in 1948, the clamor of so many "conservatives" for a "progressive" Republican Party, the happy, burgeoning group of Eastern Progressives and their increasing power in the Senate. See the emergence of the New York Herald Tribune, that unbelievably unprincipled and opportunistic newssheet, as the spokesman for New Republicanism. Surely, if the metamorphosis of the conservative opposition continues in this direction, it won't be long before we have satisfied Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., of our patriotism. And this seems to be the most ambitious goal of many good Republicans.

How is it, I'd like to know, that so many of us heed and even solicit the counsel of our sworn enemies, the collectivists? To begin with, what reason have we to believe that they are acting in good faith when they spell out to us a platform which, they insist, might woo the American people away from their demigods, the Democrats? I should as soon believe that Schlesinger, Agar, et al, are altruistically concerned over the prosperity of Republicanism as I would that the Soviet Union is interested in nourishing democracy.

What so many Republicans have been guilelessly willing to interpret as benevolent and detached advice on how they ought to conduct themselves is in fact something else: it is nothing more than a typical symptom of the "liberals'" obsessive desire to distend bipartisanship -- as it has been applied, for example, to foreign policy -- to all other issues as well. It is a well-calculated maneuver to destroy, rather than to construct, an intelligent and meaningful opposition.

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This is in the collectivist tradition. Deviations are as heinous to the New Dealer as they are to the Stalinist. But for a few minor embellishments, the demagoguery of the Reuther or the Charlie Michelson is as intolerant of the opposition as that of the Gromyko or the Ehrenburg; and it is natural that this be so. For after all, socialism scorns competition. It follows naturally that competition at the most crucial echelon -- national policy -- should appear most appalling to the Statists, and that they should, accordingly, focus their best energies to proscribing any significant policy alternatives at this level.

An additional reason explains the collectivist anxiety for homogeneity in national policy. While the American individualist hearkens always to one hundred and fifty million human beings, all of whom ought not be impeded from harboring and implementing one hundred and fifty million convictions and policies, the collectivists' concern is with one policy, the State's policy. And there is only one State. Their stakes are therefore high, for it's win the State or lose the battle. Since the Statists have never been squeamish about their methods, it is only natural that they should exploit every potential ally; and a most valuable ally has always been the conservative, whose demonstrated gullibility makes him easy prey.

And how do they camouflage these raw tactics? Advice from collectivists to individualists is automatically suspect. So, they tag their concern for a flourishing opposition as stemming from their solicitude for the democratic fabric of our institutions, which presupposes the existence of at least two political parties. This way they can destroy the opposition in the name of "democracy", which leaves them feeling clean all over.

III

It's not too early -- and not too late, let's hope -- to anticipate the forthcoming caucuses, primaries, and the lot, that will crystallize in the early summer of next year into a Republican Party Platform. Shall we be able to conduct ourselves without reference to the Schlesinger-Agar book on Political Behavior and Policy Formation? Dare we risk the displeasure of the "liberals" by adopting a platform which, on the domestic level at least, rings forth with a clear alternative to, and an equally clear denunciation of, the collectivism of the Democrats?

Several questions are posed here. The first is, can the Republicans win if they publicly decry the "social revolution" which we are enjoined to respect as a fait accompli? The second, of course, is do we care about winning if we don't do just that?

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One thing we know: in the past we have temporized with collectivism and we have lost. And after the campaigns were over, we were left not with the exhilaration and pride of having done our best to restore freedom, but with the sickening humiliation of having failed to seduce the American people because we were pitted against a more glib, a more extravagant, a more experienced gigolo.

Assuming, then, that we shall campaign in behalf of what we feel in our hearts and minds to be in the best interests of the American people, will our program appear to be a negative one? Most certainly it will. For it will call for the abolition of Federal power and control wherever possible. It will call for the abolition of farm, school, and house subsidies, social security, controls, government loans and financing, pork barrelling, special privileges, and much more that is "negative".

All such legislation continues to imply that the State can better administer social power, that the central government knows better than the people, acting individually or through their local governments, how best to spend the people's money. If we are guilty of "negativism" in calling for the pruning of State power, then at least we have honorable bedfellows in our Constitutional fathers.

IV

Frederick von Hayek stated in the Road to Serfdom that the line that separated individualism from collectivism is clear-cut. Those of us who believe this to be so ought to acknowledge that line and give the American people an opportunity to step to one side of it or to the other. To that end, I respectfully sketch out the following thoughts as a possible basis for a preamble to the Republican Party's 1952 platform:

"The American people are engaged in two wars -- the one against Russian imperialism, the other against government paternalism. Only history will tell whether Joseph Stalin or Franklin Roosevelt will have wrought greater damage to individual freedom in the United States.

"Our task today is to cast off defiantly the influence of both offenders. Our foreign policy must aim at the destruction of Soviet power; and our domestic aim is the dissolution of the bureaucracy consistent with waging an effective fight against Stalinism. Both struggles must be won, or neither is worth winning."

* * *

As for the hoots and cries from the Schlesingers, let them come. After all, their program still has a ways to go before they can shut us up forcibly.

God and Man at Yale, by William F. Buckley, Jr., is scheduled for publication in October, by Henry Regnery Co., Chicago.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VIII, No. 29

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By Frank C. Hanighen July 18, 1951

NEW INVESTIGATION: In a week which saw two high State Department officials suspended as possible "security risks", Capitol Hill was stirred to expect other startling revelations and probes. Mr. Lattimore spent a great deal of time in the McCarran Committee Room -- which may mean much or little in new evidence. But it does indicate that the McCarran Committee is still seeking to obtain a clear and comprehensive picture of the reasons for our Far Eastern debacle.

Good as that is, it is not enough. So there is a new line of inquiry projected by those on the Hill who want to know not only why our position across the Pacific was undermined, but also why the obvious road-block to communism in Europe was never maintained. They mean Germany.

It would be surprising, therefore, if more is not heard of an important congressional plan to find out how the Reds laid the foundation for the present deplorable situation in Germany. Keen-witted members of Congress -- whether or not they say it to the press -- want to investigate charges that the Morgenthau Plan was originally created by communist cells within the Administration; that the civilian personnel of the American occupation in Germany was staffed by strange characters from Washington who knew little about Germany but a great deal about the methods of destroying capitalism; that, under cover of the word "anti-cartelization", similar characters did their best to sabotage the recovery of German industry; and that the same sinister figures helped produce the present "pacifism" and "neutralism" which today oddly colors the formerly belligerent German character.

All these matters, it is felt by many on the Hill, are just as much in need of clarification as the motivation for the appalling "agrarian reform" propaganda on China.

(It has not escaped the consideration of such militant probers on the Hill, that an investigation might include examination of the activities of General Eisenhower, first commander of the occupation in Germany. Why is it -- they will ask -- that Germans, rank and file, hate the name of the man who today is supposed to coax them into a posture of military defense of Western Europe?)

All these curiosities, if they effectively shape such an investigation, should serve to fix responsibility for a state of affairs which constantly perplexes conscientious legislators and the mass of the voters, namely: why is it that six years after our overwhelming military victory in World War II, we have no really powerful and loyal allies to counter the Soviet menace? Whose fault is this?

* * * * *

EUROPEAN ARMY: Even if, miraculously, the Germans turn to and create a substantial army, will even that addition of strength prove sufficient to offset Russian military might? And -- concretely -- what does the potential Russian military threat amount to? We have been lucky enough to see a report of exactly what military experts say the Russian Army would do, if it started to move westward. Few here think that the Red Army will elect to invade Western Europe this year, but many in the U.S. would like to know what the Eisenhower venture may have to face, if not this year, perhaps next year.

The report says that Russian aggression would probably take the following form:

Five divisions would invade Denmark.

Twenty-five divisions would invade the West German plain.

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Fifteen divisions would attack from Thuringia.

Five divisions would attack from Czechoslovakia.

Twenty would invade Italy.

In short, a total of 70 enemy divisions. The assumption is that this invasion would not take place before the summer of 1952 and by that time the West would have about 60 divisions (if plans go well) to meet this attack.

But members of Congress who have visited Europe and studied the situation fail to see how 60 divisions of Western troops (if we have them) could successfully take care of such an invasion. Their arithmetic does not support such optimism.

For instance, it is generally believed that the Soviet satellites have about 60 divisions; and that the Soviet Russian army in Eastern Europe amounts to about 175 divisions. That makes a total of 235 divisions against the West.

The total number of enemy divisions (as outlined in the above-mentioned report) would run to 70 divisions in the first wave of invasion. Supposing we were able to check the first wave. How would we handle, with 60 battered divisions, the supporting Red troops which -- by obvious arithmetic -- total 170 divisions? That is quite a margin of superiority.

This burning question, we are informed, has been put to General Marshall on the Hill. Up to date, members of Congress have not received an answer.

* * * * *

KANSAS CITY FLOOD: The President's trip to the city which has been a victim of flood is interpreted as "crypto-political". It is known that Truman had for some time been wanting to go to the Middle West and try to recapture some popular support. Chairman "Bill" Boyle, Democratic party strategist, had dissuaded the President from what Boyle considered unwise. The latter deemed anti-Truman sentiment in that area so strong that an obvious political speaking trip would exacerbate it. But now, the flood disaster has given Truman a chance to make a gesture of "humanity". And it offers him an excellent opportunity to appeal to sentiment in prairie states for flood control and reclamation appropriations.

This political stunt comes in the nick of time. The farmers are clearly on the warpath against the Administration. Observers of Congress say the strong opposition to controls in the pending Defense Production Act, which finds voice in the speeches of Congressmen from rural states, springs from spontaneous discontent at home and not from "deals" or planned collaboration in the lobbies of both Houses. The mail from the constituencies, it is reported, bears this out. Farmers are mad -- not the least because they consider the Administration demand for controls as simply a bid for labor votes. The Truman gesture may well neutralize some of this unrest.

There's another aspect of the Kansas City inundation that impresses members from farm areas. Isn't that city suffering from the results of the same excessive rainfall over a wide area which has prompted much doubt about the fate of the corn crop? The "hundred-bushel-an-acre" fields are in "bottom lands" and these have reportedly suffered most from the unusual rainfall. The last crop report of the Department of Agriculture -- it is said -- did not reflect this condition accurately. An early change in the weather, of course, could remove such doubts and ensure a fine crop. But, for the moment many have their fingers crossed as to the forecasts of a "record corn crop". If the next report from the Department betrays caution, a lot of people will look for high corn prices. And that, it is felt, will certainly be a factor for the inflation which is now prophesied for next winter.

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KEFAUVER BOOK: The Kefauver Traveling Video Show closed down on May 1. For some months, millions gazed on the Tennessee Senator's peculiarly "benign" countenance,

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the headlines spelled out his name (including his Christian name) daily, and the eminent statesman -- in the manner of eminent statesmen -- did not exactly shun the resultant glare of publicity. But -- his advisers knew full well -- fame is fleeting. Lest it fleet too fast, speedy literary preparations were made. And now, just about ten weeks after the committee curtain rang down on the Senator, the one and only Estes Kefauver comes out with a 333-page account of his crusade. He calls it "Crime in America" (published by Doubleday Doran).

The book (it has hard covers and is offered for the low price of three inflated dollars) consists of highlights of the hearings, replete with stern adjectives for the criminal characters the author dragged from darkness into kleig-light, illustrated with forty-one photographs, well flavored with sermons and admonitions to the American people -- the whole held together by a ghost-writer's diaper pins.

The fly-leaf tells us that the book was "edited" by Sidney Shallett, who also contributed an introduction. The latter job is really the pièce de résistance. Besides underlining the assertion that Kefauver is a great man, it coyly hints that he is great enough to be chosen President of the United States.

We doubt that serious sociologists (that is, if there are any) will profit from reading it. One will search in vain for any reasonable, persuasive approach to the problem of public gambling. Nothing is offered save more Federal regulation, controls, laws, etc. There is no recognition that, under cover of combatting crime, state power (one of our precious heritages) may be weakened and subordinated to that of centralized Federal Government.

The volume is a monument to crass political ambition -- the bald desire to pander to public morbidity about crime and to exploit this public curiosity for political purposes.

This is bad enough. But there is something even more unsavory about this whole matter. There is a persistent suspicion among some observers that the whole crime investigation was at least nourished, if not originally motivated, by the desire of some Administration elements to divert public attention from the probes and trials of subversives. The famous Video show in New York occurred just at the time when the most serious of all the trials of subversives -- that of the Soviet atom bomb spies -- was in mid-progress in the same city. If the crime show was timed to "blanket" the newspaper coverage of this highly important spy trial, it certainly achieved marked success.

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EMBATTLED EDUCATORS: "...the entire nation is pocked with battlefields of the war against modern education". So begins a pamphlet authored by Ernest O. Melby, Dean of the School of Education, New York University. The Dean is also the generalissimo of the "workshops" now being held in New York, at which school administrators are being briefed on ways and means of meeting the "enemy" -- that is, the organized or unorganized opposition of parents and taxpayers to what is called "progressive" education. The burden of this briefing is that such opposition stems from ignorance or malice and that it is the duty of school administrators to sell themselves to the public as "experts" whose qualifications put them above criticism.

Since HUMAN EVENTS published an exposé of "progressive" education, under the title Storm Over Pasadena, we have been advised by readers over the country that their localities are up in arms, giving support to the statement that "the entire nation is pocked with battlefields". Politicians may traduce the American citizen, but the American parent is too keenly interested in his child to be misled by the self-styled arbiters of education. Somehow he senses that "progressivism" is nothing but training in collectivism, and he does not equate that with education. Perhaps, therefore, the anti-collectivistic forces of America might do better to throw more weight into the educational front, on the theory that the political front is only an effect, not a cause.

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Book Events

The Great Idea, by Henry Hazlitt. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. $3.50.
Reviewed by Frank Chodorov.

Henry Hazlitt has a right to dream. In the exercise of this inalienable prerogative, Henry comes up with a full-length fantasy, which he calls The Great Idea.

The world of Henry's dream is socialistic, all wool and a yard wide. About a century and a quarter prior to the events recorded in this book, and after an atom bomb had liquidated the will to resist him, Karl Marx marched in and took over. He did a thorough job of management. During the years, capitalism was spurlos versenkt; even the word was eradicated from memory, and all the books and records of the pre-Marxian era had gone up in smoke, so that an inquisitive mind had nothing to go by. Language, history, science, music -- everything had been completely canalized into the socialistic pattern.

A fellow named Stalinen is top-boss of this millenium, which Hazlitt calls Oneworld, and his roost is Moscow. When the story opens, the old boy, having suffered a stroke, is cogitating the matter of a successor. His problem is solved by the appearance of his long-lost son; apparently, socialism hasn't been able to eradicate the urgings of parental affection. But, this boy presents problems, for he is completely ignorant of the way things are done in Oneworld. When he was a shaver, the Dictator and his wife fell out, and she saved her own and her son's life by accepting banishment to Bermuda; there she was to confine the boy's education to mathematics and music. Peter was never to hear a thing about history, economics, politics, science. When the death of his mother sends him back to his father's world, this lack of equipment is a heavy handicap.

Peter must be put through a course of training before he can undertake his duties. His education, despite his aptness, is retarded by two emotional blockings: he hates the abject poverty that prevails in Oneworld, and he hates the way people are abused by the overseers. So then, when his daddy is finally bumped off -- by the fellow who expected to be called to the throne -- and Peter maneuvers himself into the dictatorship, he decides to do something about correcting conditions. That's where Hazlitt's "great idea" comes into play. To be more exact, that's where he mounts the rostrum and gives the reader an extended lesson in "laissez faire" economics.

Peter wants freedom and plenty, but, being ignorant of economics, he tries to introduce freedom first. That doesn't work. The people are quite uninterested. It is only when he hits on the idea of ridding them of economic restrictions that they become susceptible to the concept of political freedom. Since our author-dreamer is strong for a free currency, it is natural that Peter should have come, quite accidentally, on a monetary solution of poverty. Because our dictator is without any economic knowledge, knows nothing about money, not even the word, he does the thing that common sense suggests to him: he frees ration coupons of the restrictions put on them and incidentally creates a free money market. That begins the way back to a free economy and a free world.

The book is in fact a blueprint of how the world will return to freedom after it has suffered a long spell of socialism, stressing the point that political freedom is a consequence of economic freedom, and not the other way around. To drive home that lesson, Hazlitt gives us a thorough-going exposition of the fallacies of Marxism, which necessitates an equally minute explanation of the principles of the free economy. Thus, it necessarily becomes text-bookish at times, despite the novel form that Hazlitt has affected. One would have to stretch a point to list it as a novel, but the fact remains that the plot, characters and dialogue do help to make the lesson more digestible. The reader does not have to push himself through the book -- and that suggests how much more effective it would be than the average text-book in economics or, perhaps, political science.

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